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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: INFLUENCE ANALYSIS

REF: STATE 33359

1. (U) The following text was compiled in report form per reftel. Begin text:

DJIBOUTI

Djibouti,s population is estimated at 600,000 inhabitants from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Somalis make up the majority, followed by the Afars and a minority of Arabs. The population has ethnic, cultural and religious ties with Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Yemen. An important number of French nationals and Ethiopian migrants also reside in country. Djibouti gained its independence from the French in 1977.

The country's mixed economy has little industry and few natural resources. Most people reside in Djibouti City where poverty and unemployment rates are high. Outside the capital city, the primary economic activity is nomadic subsistence. The part of the annual gross domestic product not generated by and for the foreign community is estimated at no more than \$250 per capita annually. Much of the country's wealth, education and influence are concentrated in the hands of a small elite.

The Government (GODJ) limits citizens' rights to change their government and restricts freedom of the press. It also limits freedom of assembly, uses force to disperse demonstrations and strikes, and restricts freedom of association.

Print, television, broadcast and electronic media services exist in Djibouti. Most, however, are state controlled. Accordingly, the President and his cabinet level officials figure prominently in the headlines, which are received with a degree of cynicism by the population. There is no confusion about the President,s complete control over the country,s largest media outlets. Post has good relations with the state media and can normally facilitate coverage of events that contribute to the positive portrayal of the United States.

The main state run paper is La Nation. Published in French thrice weekly (Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday), its editor is Adil Ahmed Youssouf and its circulation is about 4,000. La Nation is read by most literate, metropolitan Djiboutians regardless of their political affiliation despite its role as the government mouthpiece. It is sold in newstands and by street vendors. Distribution outside the city is limited to the commissaires (district governors), school principals and teachers.

Al Qarn is the Arabic version of La Nation and has the same editorial stance. Its editor is Moumin Hassan Barreh and its circulation is considerably less than La Nation because it targets the small Arabic speaking community and Arab foreign missions (Djibouti is an Arab League Member). Al Qarn is published twice weekly (Monday and Thursday) and is available in newstands and with street vendors.

Le Progrs is published in French on Mondays and is the governing party Rassemblement Populaire pour le Progres (RPP) propaganda paper. Its editor is Mohamed Hassan Ahmed and its circulation is about 300. It is available in newstands and with street vendors in Djibouti City, but outside of town its readership is almost non-existent.

Local officials do not as a rule hold press conferences. Visiting U.S. officials are afforded the opportunity to address the press during/after meetings with Djiboutian officials or on site visits. The Embassy often utilizes press releases to provide its information about U.S. activities to the press. A large percentage of Djibouti,s population is illiterate, hence TV coverage often reaches a larger audience than the print media.

Djibouti has a state run television station that is regularly viewed between 7-9 p.m. countrywide. Radio Television Djibouti (RTD) is led by Director Abdi Atteyeh, although the President and Minister of Communications retain editorial control. RTD programs are broadcast in the local languages of Afar and Somali as well as the two official languages, Arabic and French.

Although RTD has a strong audience among those wealthy enough to buy televisions, the most heavily watched programming in Djibouti is the French channel Canal Plus.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Arab broadcasts from Egypt and Saudi Arabia including Al-Jazeera<sup>8</sup> reach audiences in Djibouti.

Because of its small size and nomadic history, Djiboutian society has a strong oral tradition that naturally feeds the local popularity of radio. Radio remains one of the few cost-effective means for the population to gather information, and is often considered more trustworthy than other outlets. It also reaches more people per capita than any other medium.

RTD's radio division is popular and includes programming in news, education, culture and health. BBC Somali is also extremely popular. The IBB presence in Djibouti currently includes two FM transmitters and one medium wave radio tower and broadcasts are in French, English and Arabic. Radio broadcasts in the Somali language would reach the largest part of the population.

The divide between state and independent print press is a critical issue. The "independent" print press is often accurately considered more "opposition" than "independent."

Ralit is published in French each Wednesday and is the official mouth-piece of one party of the opposition coalition, ARD (Alliance Rpublicaine pour le Dveloppement - Republican Alliance for Development, President of which is Ahmed Dini). Its circulation is about 500 and its outspoken criticism of the government is popular with the general public.

Le Renouveau Djiboutien is published in French on Thursdays and is the official mouthpiece of the MRD (Mouvement pour le Renouveau Democratique). Its editor is the well-known opposition figure Daher Ahmed Farah and its circulation is estimated at 1000. Openly critical of the Government of Djibouti, Le Renouveau Djiboutien is frequently banned by the government and Farah was recently imprisoned for charges of defamation of character levied against him after he published an unflattering article about the country's number two military officer.

The independent print press frequently serves a watch dog type role over government operations; however, it is also highly politicized. That said, it is still a good forum for indirect promotion of American values such as human rights, transparency and democracy. Embassy interaction with these outlets is often a delicate political issue. We currently engage them through our Washington File distribution, with press releases and with invitations to background briefings.

Djiboutians in general have extensive experience with the West, particularly the French. Although some journalists are Western trained, the press corps is largely limited and unprofessional. Existing Djiboutian media outlets offer few opportunities for investigative reporting and there is no system for educating those interested in journalism. The Embassy has found that it is most likely to ensure accurate extensive coverage of U.S. activities by providing the media with copies of prepared texts. A few local journalists do act as stringers for international news outlets such as the BBC, RFI and VOA.

Diifu is the only group in country actively pursuing the development of a truly independent press. A group of about 15 enthusiastic young adults, Diifu hopes to one day publish regularly in Afar, French, English, Arabic and Somali. However, it faces many political and financial challenges. Post believes that support for Diifu is currently our best method of encouraging an independent press with broad access to many groups in the community.

Aside from local media, one must note the active international media environment in Djibouti. Djibouti is the single largest per capita recipient of US foreign assistance in Africa and has the only US military installation on the continent (CJTF-HOA). Because of this important geopolitical position, the country receives the continued attention of a wide-spectrum of media. In addition to local media responsibilities in the last year, Post hosted such high profile international media as the New York Times, CNN, The LA Times, AP, ABC, Le Figaro, USA Today, Radio France International, Fox News, BBC, The London Times and Reuters. Media responsibilities as they pertain to the Global War on Terror are shared with the Public Affairs section for CJTF-HOA at Camp Lemonier. Embassy Djibouti and CJTF-HOA PA currently have a good, cooperative working relationship which we believe promotes a unified message and broad range of coverage in the international media.

#### Telecommunications Infrastructure

Telecommunications remains one of the largest barriers to

promoting information flow and business investment in Djibouti. The country is well positioned to develop its internet connectivity and availability as it is home to a large hub -- the South East Asia - Middle East - Western Europe #3 (Sea-Me-We3) transoceanic cable connection between Europe and Asia. The connection apportioned to Djibouti on Sea-Me-We3 is so small it is nearly obsolete, however. The root of the internet connectivity problem is the inadequate telephone network in Djibouti and the high cost of telephone lines, which prohibit many from having dedicated land lines for Internet. Problems with reliability of the lines also plague both internet and telephone communications. Internet access is rare in schools and businesses, although there is a small thriving group of internet cafes in the city. Although the price of internet service in Djibouti is still prohibitive, more and more educated youth are using these cafes to obtain their information.

#### Key Institutions

##### The Judicial System ) Very Important

After independence, Djibouti retained in large part the French Napoleonic code judicial system. The French did not, unfortunately, train any local judges and GODJ relied on the French judges for many years after independence. A number of local judges were gradually trained over the years but the shortage still exists.

The existing Judiciary does not operate independently of the executive branch. Promoting transparency and independent operations is a priority to eliminate executive interference as well as tribal influences on judicial decisions.

##### Political Parties ) Very Important

At independence, government opted to keep one official political party in order to prevent disintegration along tribal affiliations. The RPP was born in March 1979 and Mr. Hassan Gouled Aptidon, who was President of the Republic at that time, was elected its first President. Since its inception, one clan -- the Issas -- have completely dominated the RPP. In reaction, the second largest ethnic group -- the Afars -- formed their own political party, the Front pour la Restauration de l'Unité (FRUD). The political climate became so tense that it culminated in civil war from 1991 to 1994.

The Djiboutian Constitution, finalized in 1992, lifted the ban on political parties by allowing political pluralism with a maximum of four parties for a transitional period of ten years. By January 2002, eight parties grouped in two coalitions were represented in the parliamentary elections. However in the 2002 legislative elections, the ruling party coalition won all 65 seats, amid opposition claims of massive fraud. PD programs must focus on political pluralism, grassroots democracy and transparency in order to promote free and fair elections.

##### Government/Elections\*Very Important

Djibouti is a republic with a strong presidency and a weak legislature. In 1999, the country elected its second president since gaining independence in 1977. Ismael Omar Guelleh, the candidate of the RPP, won the election with 74 percent of the vote. PD must target issues of transparency, free and fair elections and grassroots democracy in preparation this year,s first-ever regional elections and for next year,s presidential election.

##### Security and Defense ) Very Important

Security, defense and the Global War on Terror remain the thrust of many of our MPP goals and public affairs programs. Strategy includes highlighting our many anti-terrorism programs and trainings here including, ATA, mil-to-mil training and CJTF-HOA civil affairs projects. In addition, PD must continue to focus messages of respect for human rights and due process on security and defense services.

##### NGOs ) Marginally Important

The NGO community is small and has cordial ties but does not act in conjunction with the Embassy. While we believe that donor and NGO projects should be more closely coordinated, the NGO community is not a target for our PD activities.

##### Academic Institutions ) Very Important

PD Djibouti has an active relationship with the country,s only university, Pole University. We believe this to be one of our most important venues for engagement thanks to the demographics of the audience (educated Muslims aged 17-27),and their enthusiasm for access to English language resources. While Post,s relationship with the student body

is excellent, the relationship with the administration remains complicated because of the large percentage of funding provided to the institution by the French.

In addition, one of our easiest entry points into the community is the English night schools, which have few resources or training but high enrollment from all walks of society.

Many of our USAID programs focus on improving the quality of education in country, and many of our PD resources should be focused on highlighting that involvement with the Djiboutian educational system.

Mosques ) Increasingly Important

Despite the fact that the country is 98 percent Muslim, Post currently does not engage the religious community in an effective way. Two PD strategies for doing so include increased distribution of Arabic language materials and targeting grants to moderate Islamic groups in country.

The American Community ) Increasingly Important

Post provides American Citizen Services to US citizens in Djibouti and Northwest Somalia. With the addition of CJTF-HOA and its attached contractors, the American community serviced here has grown drastically. The 2006 MPP focuses on better access to our American constituents with information on voting, passports, adoptions and other consular services. Our main strategy for doing so remains the Camp Lemonier newsletter, as well as public presentations at the Camp.

RAGSDALE